

On The Way

The Beatitudes: Blessed are the peacemakers...

Peace is one of the deepest longings of the human heart. And with good reason. We were created in peace, in original harmony with God, ourselves, one another, and the world. Our longing for peace witnesses to an essential but wounded dimension of who we are.

The first man and woman were created in harmony. Their rebellion against God broke their harmony with him and set in motion a series of disruptions. Suddenly, they were at odds with themselves, literally not comfortable in their own skin and thus covering themselves with fig leaves. They were at odds with one another, falling into mutual recriminations. They were at odds with creation. We are the heirs of that disharmony, and we feel it keenly.

At the heart of Christ's mission is the reestablishment of this harmony, of this peace. He is the "Prince of Peace," whose birth the angels announce by declaring "Peace on earth." In his final discourse he grants his disciples the inheritance we all long for: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." He establishes this peace through His Blood shed on the Cross. On Easter Sunday, having triumphed over sin and death, he speaks what we all desire to hear: "Peace be with you."

This peace is more than just the absence of conflict. The Hebrew word *shalom* derives from a root which means "to be intact, complete." It indicates harmony with God and thus with all else. It is, in Saint Augustine's words, the "tranquility of order." Our union with God restores (as much as can be done this side of heaven) peace within ourselves, with one another, and with creation. As we see in the saints, our growth in grace means a growth in peace and peacefulness.

Which brings us to the last Beatitude: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.* Those who ascend the ladder of the Beatitudes – who detach themselves from the world; who strive after justice and mercy; who attain purity of heart; who, in short, realize their identity as children of God – they are not only set at peace but also become peacemakers. They know that this peace is not of their own making but comes from Christ on the Cross. The peacemakers are those who have accepted Christ's sacrifice and have received his peace.

The term here would perhaps be better translated "artisans of peace," which hints at the effort and discernment involved in peacemaking. An artisan has a craft, not just a job, and he attends to it with great care. So also, peacemakers differ from the merely peaceful. These peacemakers are not the timid who avoid conflict, but those who are discerning enough to know true peace and courageous enough to work for it in the world.

Saint Augustine associates the Holy Spirit's Gift of Wisdom with this Beatitude: "Wisdom corresponds to the peacemakers, in whom everything is in order and there is no emotion to rebel against reason, but all things obey the spirit of man just as it obeys God." Wisdom is not simply being smart or knowing a lot. Rather, wisdom brings order and unity into the many and varied aspects of life and of the human person. Because the soul of the peacemaker is set in order, he has the wisdom to discern how to bring order to the world, how to reject the false peace and choose the true.